

THE LETICIA INCIDENT

COMMISSION FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE TERRITORY OF LETICIA, 1933-1934

This exhibit explores the League of Nations' involvement with the '*Leticia Incident*', a territorial dispute between Colombia and Peru. In an attempt to defuse the combat, Colombia and Peru agreed to arbitration by the League of Nations. The League appointed three member nations as a '*Commission for the Administration of the Territory of Leticia*'. Each side's military forces were withdrawn and a neutral force under the Commission's supervision policed the disputed area. This was the earliest use of a military force, under international control, for peace-keeping purposes.



Colombia
Coat of Arms



War Memorial in Tarapacá, Colombia

"To the Heroes of the Colombian Air Force; who with true courage gave the best of themselves; flying with their noble aircraft over river and jungle. Declaring over our Amazonia with the sound of their motors the sovereignty of our country during the war with Peru." - Wikipedia/Wikimedia



Peru
Coat of Arms

Exhibit Plan

The Port City of Leticia

The Combatants

The Peacemakers

Postal Routing of Commission Mail

Postal Markings of the Commission

Outgoing Service Mail

Incoming League Service Mail

Incoming Peacekeeper Mail

The League of Nations' Decision

Background of the area and the port city

Nations and personalities engaging in conflict

Nations and personalities engaging in peace efforts

Methods and routes to deliver the mail

Markings of commission mail and postal systems

Mail from the Leticia Commission

League of Nations mail to the Leticia Commission

Mail to the Leticia Commission's Peacekeepers

Leticia remains a part of Colombia

Rarity

Official service mail *to and from* the Commission is scarce due to the short period of the Commission's existence and its remote location. ***Only eighteen examples of service mail are currently recorded.***

Rare items are highlighted with dark blue underlying matting.

Leticia is the capital of the 'Department of Amazonas', a trapezoidal shaped area on the banks of the Amazon river and lies at a point called the 'Three Borders' where the countries of Colombia, Brazil and Peru meet. Founded by Peruvian ship captain Benigno Bustamante in 1867, the port city was renamed 'Leticia' by Peruvian engineer Manuel Charón for Miss Leticia Smith of Iquitos, an upriver port city.



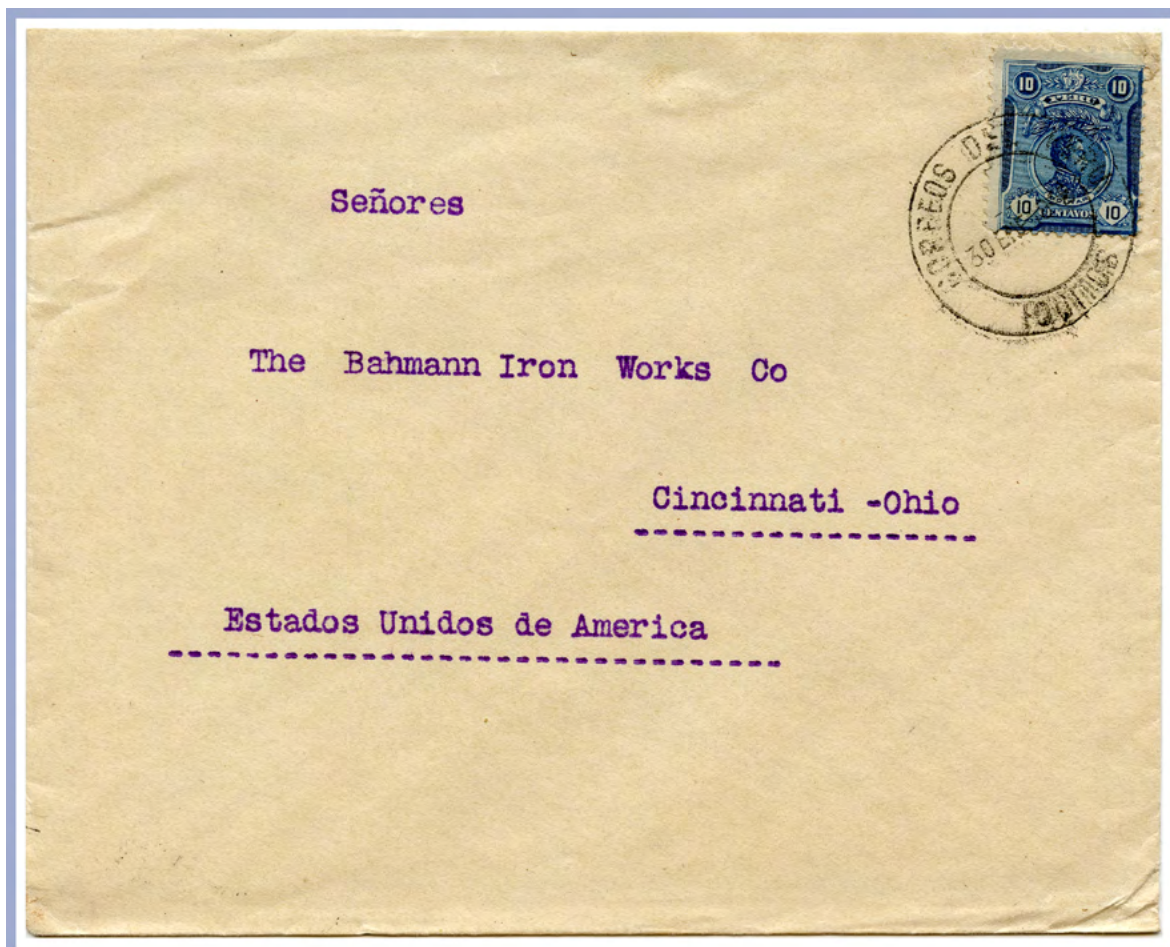
Disputed area of the port city of Leticia
Airmail value



Area enlargement



Iquitos, Peru
6 barred dater, used in 1930s



Iquitos, Peru to Cincinnati, Ohio, 30 January 1933, 10¢ foreign surface letter rate, double ring dater of 1930s

Leticia was a Peruvian port city until 1922. Border incidents between Peru and Colombia in 1911 and 1922 occurred due to Colombia's lack of a port directly on the Amazon river for shipping its natural resources, produce and goods.



Post card depicting Peruvian soldiers and military post in Leticia, Peru, prior to becoming the capital of the Colombian 'Department of Amazonas'

The governments of Colombia and Peru negotiated an agreement in 1922 giving the trapezoidal 'Department of Amazonas' to Colombia in exchange for Colombia recognizing Peru's claims to an area south of the Putumayo River that was disputed with neighboring Ecuador. The agreement was very unpopular among Peruvians, despite governmental ratification as it was signed in secret and awarded Colombia a region and a port city with a large Peruvian population.



Iquitos, Peru to Paris France, 22 August 1920
5¢ foreign surface post card rate
(Leticia had no postal facility, mail was sent from Iquitos)
Reduced copy of card reverse

A local war between Colombia and Peru erupted in September 1932 when armed Peruvian land owners, unhappy with the agreement to give Leticia to Colombia, occupied the public buildings in Leticia. They expelled city officials and the 18 local police officers as there were no Colombian military personnel garrisoned there. Peruvian President Luís Cerro was aware of the lack of Colombian military in the area and decided to support the Peruvian civilians with military action by deploying ground, naval and air forces.

Luís Cerro, President of Peru
1932 Orange-red specimen block
(design depicted living person - issue withdrawn)



Gunboat 'America'
Centavos currency before 1985



Gunboat 'Marañón'
Airmail value



Gunboat 'America'
Centimos currency after 1984

Once word of the invasion reached Bogotá, Colombian President Enrique Olaya Herrera responded with a military action to send 1500 soldiers to repel the invaders. It took Colombia a short time to organize a naval response. The Air Force however was immediately composed of commercial aircraft with machine guns and pilots flying Junkers F-13 seaplanes for 'Sociedad Colombo-Alemana de Transportes Aereos' (SCADTA).



Capitol Building, Bogotá
National revenue value
Specimen overprint
with devalue punch hole



Enrique Olaya Herrera
Colombian President



SCADTA - Junkers seaplane
Mis-perforation (top)

The Colombian Navy attacked Tarapacá (the town across the river from Leticia). Leticia was well defended and Tarapacá had no Peruvian troops. The Peruvian Air Force attacked the Colombian navy but all the bombs missed their targets.



Peruvian Air Force
Waterlow & Sons, Ltd.
Specimen overprint
(bottom center)



Congress Building, Lima
Airmail value
Overprint 'U.P.U. 1874-1949'

After a speech to his troops on 30 April 1933, a dissenting member of Congress from the opposition party shot President Luís Cerro and he died. With the assassination of President Cerro, the political impetus for the war disappeared quickly.



Luís Cerro
Peruvian President
1934 Vermillion re-issue



Candido Mariano
de Silva Rondon

Combat continued into May of 1933, when a cease-fire was negotiated by the Brazilian diplomat Candido Mariano de Silva Rondon and both sides disarmed.



Disarmament
League overprint
on Swiss value

A delayed agreement between politicians was struck two weeks later with the leader of the Colombian Liberal Party, Alfonso López Pumarejo, to request that the League of Nations mediate the conflict.



Alfonso López Pumarejo
Colombian Liberal Party

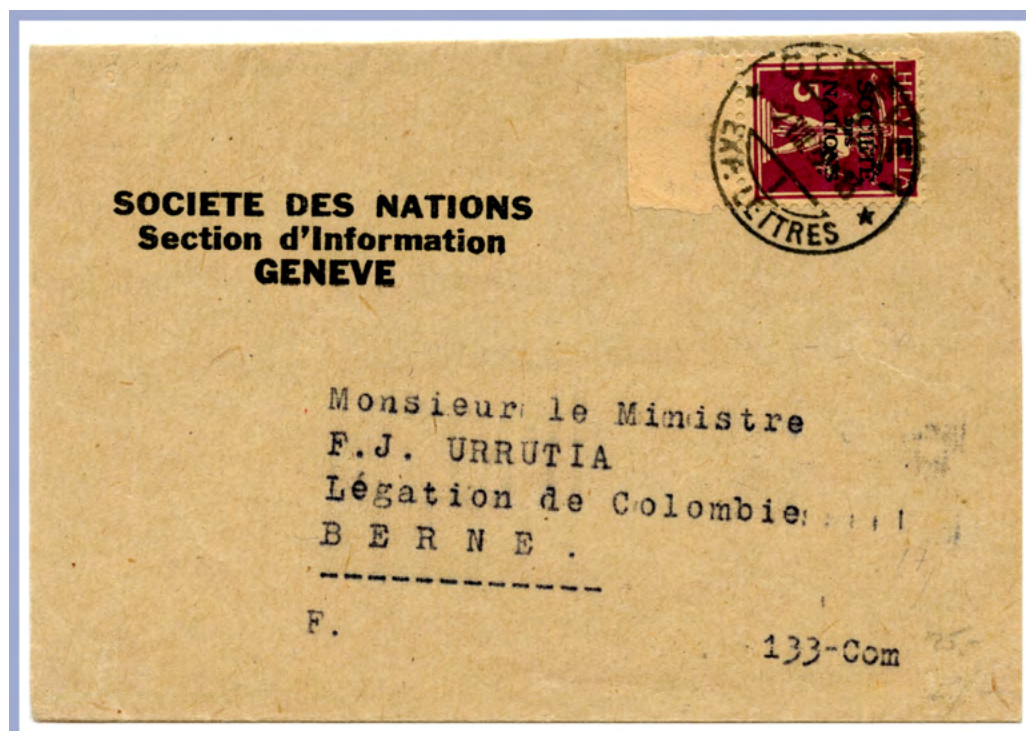


Numbered souvenir sheet, Air express value



Ministry of Foreign Relations, Lima, Peru to Brooklyn, New York, 17 May 1932
20¢ foreign surface letter rate plus 20¢ certificate fee

Both Peru and Colombia, as members of the League of Nations, agreed to allow the League of Nations to act as the intermediary in mediating the dispute to find an answer to the ongoing dispute and develop a treaty both could sign.



League of Nations, Geneva to the Colombian Legation in Bern, Switzerland, 2 August 1929
5¢ domestic printed matter rate (newspaper sleeve)



Eamon De Valera

Eamon De Valera, the League of Nations' Council President, appointed three nation members, Guatemala, Ireland and Spain, to an international commission under the League's authority to address the disagreement and to find both a peaceful and long term solution to the conflict.



League of Nations in Geneva
Overprinted (black) Swiss issue
for official use by the League
Specimen (red) overprint

Commission Member States



Guatemala
Coat of Arms



Ireland
Coat of Arms



Spain Coat of Arms
Official issue for
Judicial Branch

The international commission included representatives from League of Nations member countries Brazil and Cuba in diplomatic and administrative support roles. The United States was invited to participate with a military advisor.

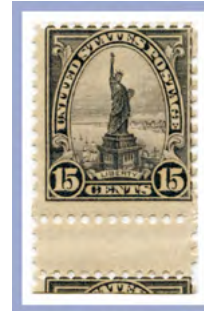
Commission Support States



Brazil Coat of Arms
Revalue overprint
missing '9' and 'S'



Cuba
Coat of Arms



United States
Gutter snipe



Capital Building, Bogotá

A provisional peace agreement in 1933 allowed Leticia Commission representatives to work out details of a treaty in the Colombian capital city of Bogotá. A force of Colombian soldiers, under the command of the League's 'Leticia Commission', policed the area. They were the first international peacekeepers. Colombian soldiers serve the U.N. in other areas to this day.



Colombian peacekeepers

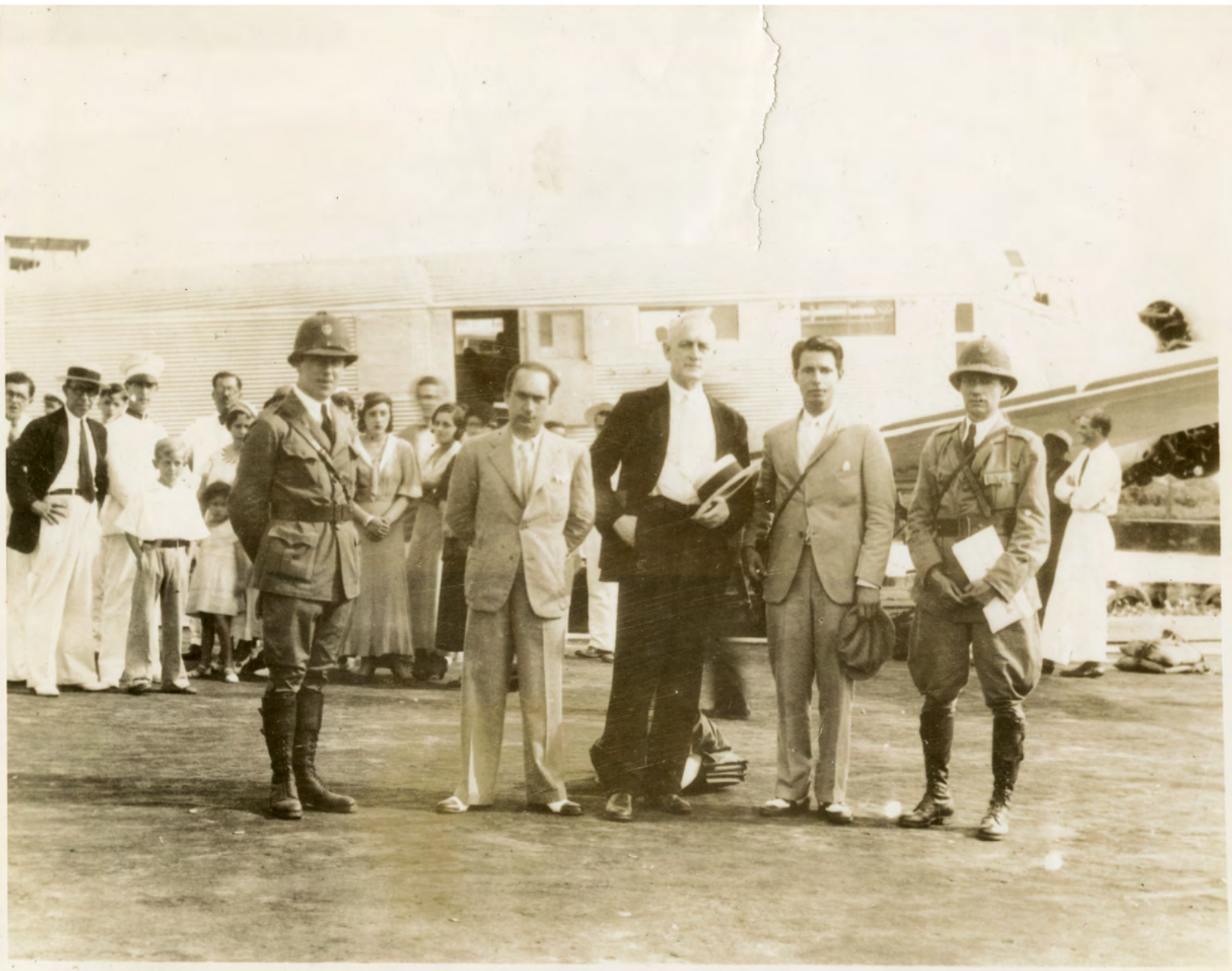


Barranquilla

The Leticia Commission's members and support representatives arrived in Colombia via the main coastal city of Barranquilla to continue to Bogotá or further still, to Leticia on the Amazon River in the south.



Bogotá



LEAGUE'S LETICIA COMMISSION ARRIVES IN COLOMBIA

"Barranquilla, Colombia ... The three members of the League of Nations Commission, pictured just before they left here on the last lap, by air, of their trip to Leticia, Colombia, where they settled the dispute between Colombia and Peru over the territory. Left to right an center are, Captain Francisco Iglesias representing Spain; Colonel Arthur Brown of the United States, and Doctor Armando Mencia of Cuba, Secretary of the Commission."

(International News Photo - 22-6-33)

Postal Routing of Leticia Commission Mail



Barranquilla - mail route origin

International mail routes to and from Colombia focused on the northwest coast of the country and the city of Barranquilla. Mail routes began there and flew nearly directly south, intersecting Bogotá along the way.



Seaplane along river route
Airmail value



SCADTA value
'R' - Registration (red)
'A' - Alemania

Within Colombia, airmail was flown by 'Sociedad Colombo-Alemana de Transportes Aereos' (SCADTA), founded and also operated by Colombians with mainly German pilots. SCADTA flew Junkers F-13 seaplanes designed and produced by Hugo Junkers. It was the first regular airline in the Americas.



Hugo Junkers
Imperforate airmail value



First airline in the Americas
Vertical dimensions differ due to perforation spacing

The mail in the southeast part of Colombia, where Leticia lies, was routed along inland waterways as airmail southern routes did not intersect with any major cities. Airports as well as paved or dirt landing strips were unavailable.



Junkers F-13 seaplane flying along inland river route
Airmail value

Postal Markings Associated with the Leticia Commission

The ‘Leticia Commission’ maintained handstamp devices to identify mail originating from its offices in Leticia. The secretary of the Commission in Leticia used a four line origin hand stamp.



43 mm diameter
Small stars / no date
Magenta

Carlos GARCIA - PALACIOS
Secretario de la Comisi3n
de Administrati3n del
Territorio de Leticia.

“Carlos Garcia-Palacios
Secretary of the Commission
for the administration of
the Territory of Leticia”



36 mm diameter
Double ring
Black

Mail routing via Ministries of Foreign Relations and Posts and Telecommunications, Bogotá, Colombia



Ministry of Foreign Relations
Bogotá, Colombia



“Ministry of Foreign Relations”
(Colombia)

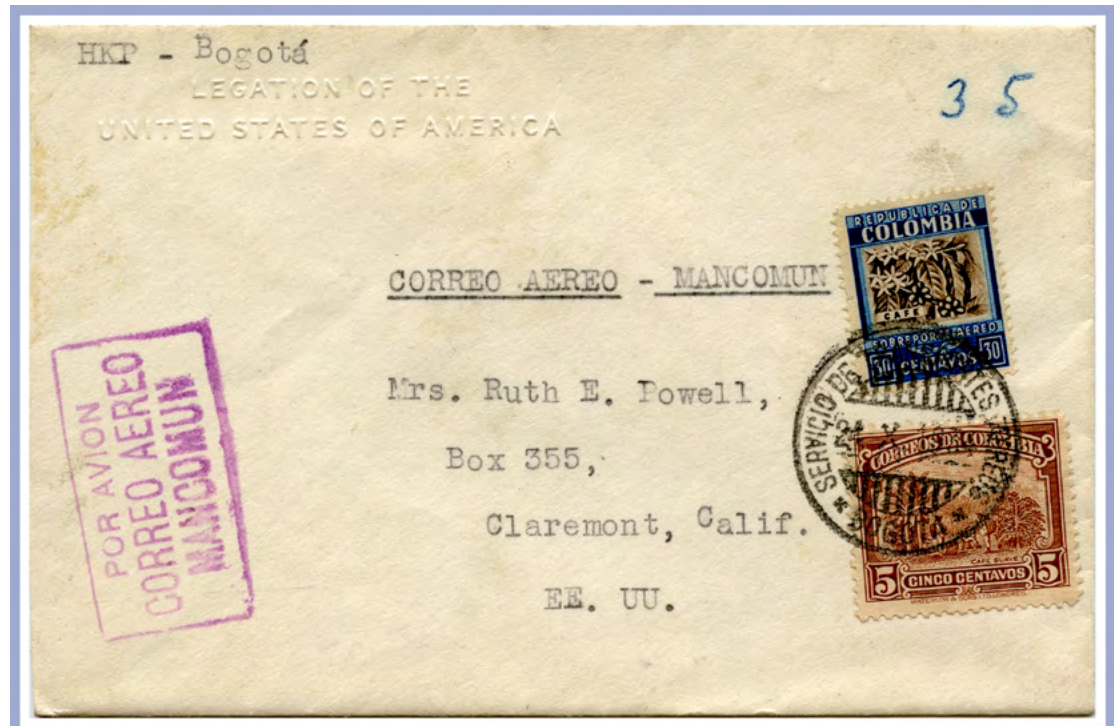
Outgoing Commission
mail was routed through
the Ministry of Foreign
Relations as well as the
Ministry of Posts and
Telecommunications,
in Bogotá.



Ministry of Telecommunications
Bogotá, Colombia
Horizontally imperforate

**Mail routing via
American Legation
Bogotá, Colombia**

Mail to the Leticia
Commission’s U.S.
military liaison was
routed through the
U.S. Legation in
Bogotá and then
onward to the U.S.
peacekeeper.



U.S. Legation Bogotá, Colombia
to Claremont, Ca., U.S.A.
24 October 1934
35¢ foreign airmail letter rate

Postal Markings Associated with the Leticia Commission

The 'Pan American Union' was formed in 1890 to promote cooperation among the countries of Latin America, Spain and the United States. The organization allowed member countries to utilize the respective postal systems free of charge for official first class mail between member states. A boxed handstamp applied to Leticia Commission mail indicated the letter was being sent 'postage paid' under the rules of the Pan American Union postal convention.



Pan American Union Headquarters
Airmail letter >1 oz. 1 August 1928



"Colombia - Ministry of Foreign Relations
Official Correspondence
Pan American Postal Franking"



Pan Am Postal Union

Only mail to Pan American Union member countries was granted this franking privilege. Mail to non-member countries was charged standard postage rates. Additional services such as airmail or registration, even to member nations, were charged standard service fees.

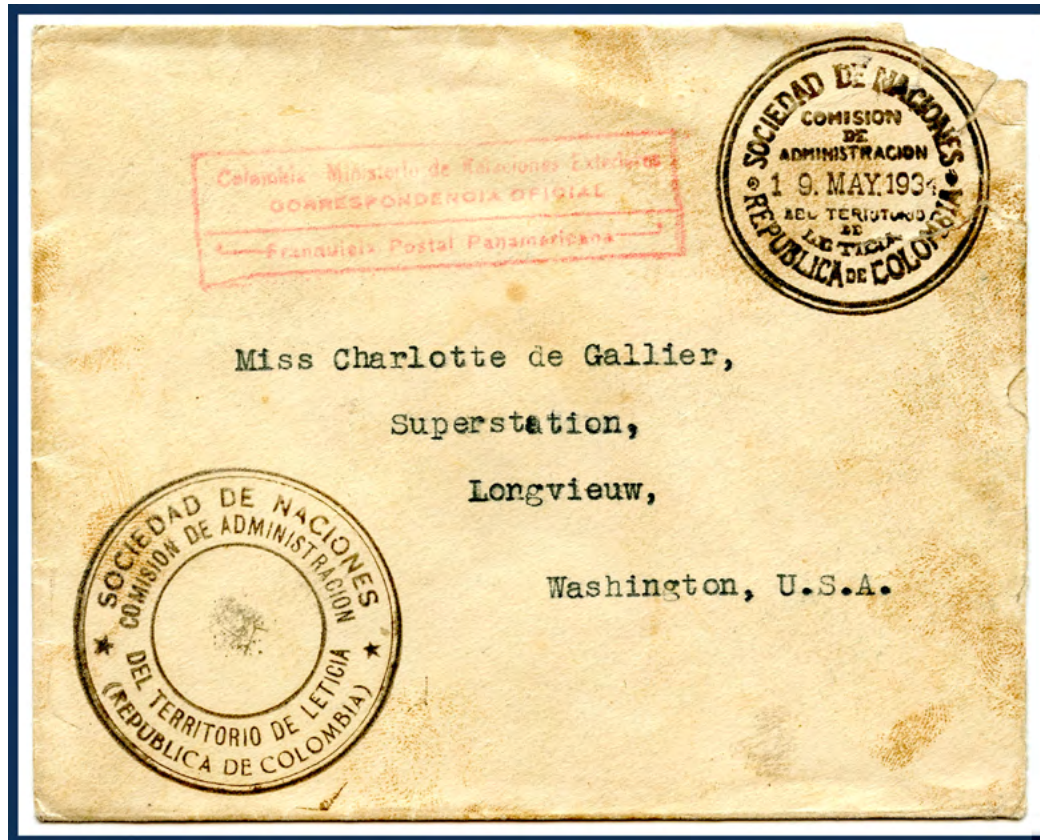


Pan American Union Headquarters penalty mail, Washington, D.C. to Denver, Colorado, 16 April 1935
Parcel cut, penalty indicia (label text under stamp) paid surface postage, airmail surcharge 6¢ per oz (10 x 6¢ = 60¢)

Outgoing Service Mail from Leticia Commission

Outgoing official service mail from the Leticia Commission was routed to its destination via the Colombian Ministry of External Affairs in Bogotá.

Nine recorded examples of 'official service mail' from the Leticia Commission



Official mail (1) from Secretary of the Commission for the Territory of Leticia (2), Colombia, 19 May 1934 (3) via Colombian Ministry of Foreign Relations Bogotá, Colombia (4), 2 June 1934 (5) to Longview, Washington, U.S.A.

Pan American Union member surface letter rate paid by postal franking privilege indicia (6)



Reduced copy of cover obverse



Markings correlation



Incoming League Mail to Leticia Commission

Mail from the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland to the Commission in Bogotá was routed via commercial mail systems via New York, New York. Mail continuing the route from Bogotá to Leticia in the south, relied on a military air courier service as there was no commercial airmail system to the port city of Leticia. Evidence for the military air courier lies in the Military Airmail and Express markings found on incoming Committee mail.

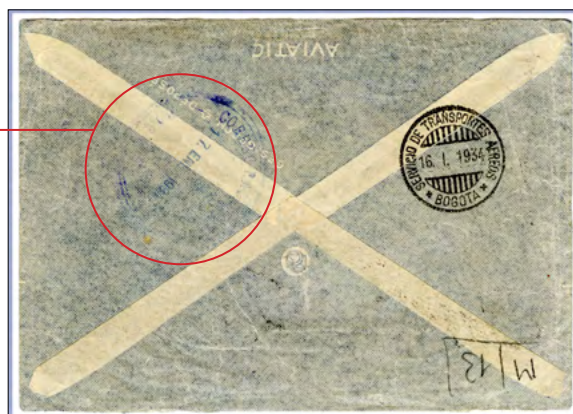
Six recorded examples of 'official service mail' to the Leticia Commission from the League of Nations



League of Nations (1) (using overprinted Swiss issues), Geneva, Switzerland, 30 December 1933 (2)
 to Secretary of the Commission for the Territory of Leticia, Colombia via Barranquilla, 15 January 1934 (3)
 Received Bogotá Air Services, 16 January 1934 (4) and Colombian Express Military Mail, Bogotá, 16 January 1934 (5)
 Forwarded 17 January 1934 (6), Airmail rate to Columbia via New York City, N.Y.
 30¢ < 20 grams surface rate plus 6F airmail fee (11 grams = 3 x 2F per 5 gram) (Convenience franking - 90c overpaid)



Military Express Mail Service



Reduced copy of cover obverse (inverted for ease in reading)



Markings correlation



Incoming League Mail to Leticia Commission

Only recorded example with official business boxed 'office of origin cachet' marking
(COMPT. = Office of the Financial Comptroller)



League of Nations (1) (using Swiss overprinted issues), Geneva, Switzerland, 30 May 1934 (2)
from the Comptroller's office - boxed COMPT. accounting services office of origin cachet (3)
to Secretary of the Commission for the Territory of Leticia, Colombia, via Barranquilla, 4 June 1934 (4)
received Bogotá, 5 June 1934 (5) and routed to Express Military Mail, 5 June 1934 (6)
Received 8 June 1934 (7) and forwarded via Colombian Express Military Mail, Bogotá, 12 June 1934 (8)
Postage rate to Colombia via New York City, N.Y.
30¢ < 20 grams surface rate plus 2F airmail fee (< 5 grams = 2F per 5 gram)

(Latest recorded 'official service mail' to or from the Leticia Commission)



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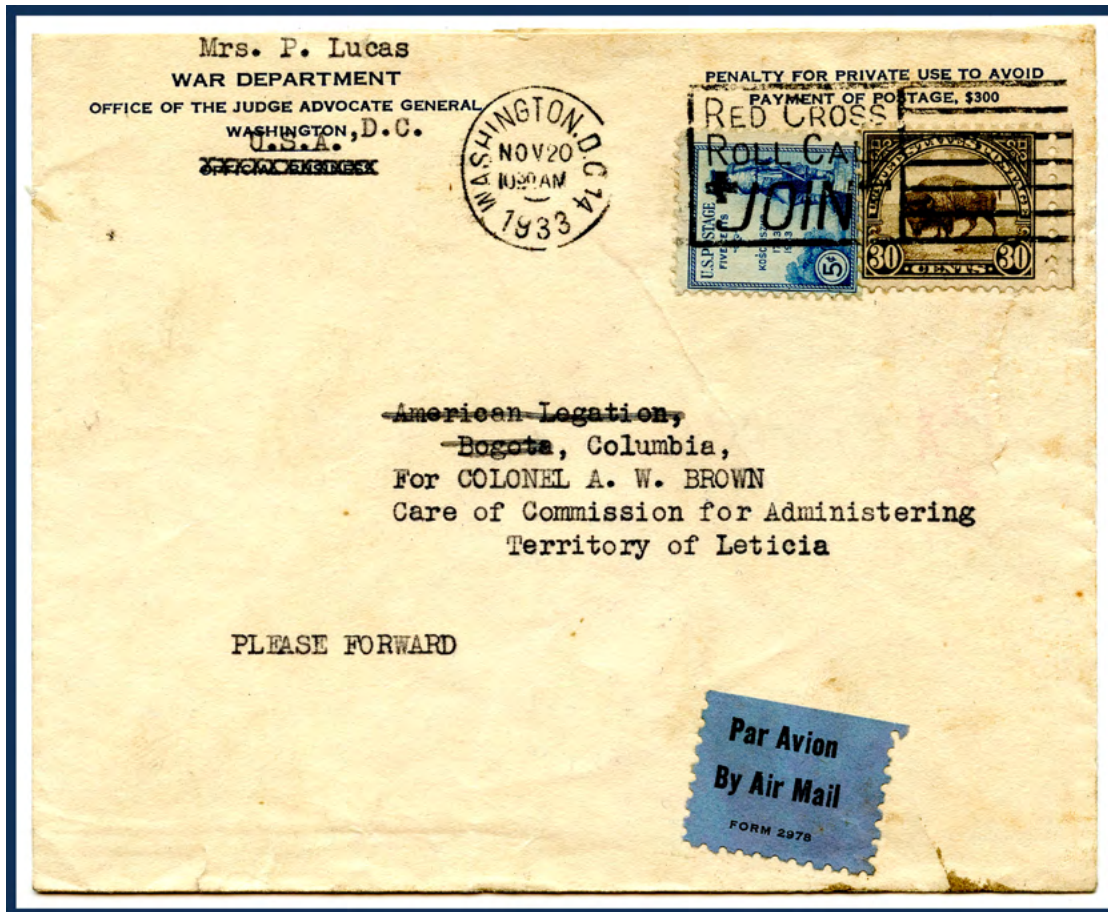
Markings correlation



Incoming Peacekeeper Mail to Leticia Commission

The peacekeeping unit was under direct command of the Leticia Commission and its military advisor group. U.S. War Department service mail to the Commission was addressed to the U.S. military representative of the International Commission.

Only recorded example of 'official service mail' to the Leticia Commission military advisor



Penalty envelope of Judge Advocate General (1), War Department, Washington, D.C., 20 November 1933 (2) to U.S. Military Liaison Colonel A.W. Brown, Commission for the Territory of Leticia, Colombia in care of the American Legation in Bogotá (3), received 24 November 1933 (4) Forwarded via Colombian Express Military Mail to Leticia, 25 November 1933 (5) Penalty clause (6) invalid for international destinations resulting in the use of postage stamps Airmail rate to Miami = 5¢; plus FAM service to Colombia = 30¢ per 1/2 oz. as of 6/15/1930



Reduced copy of cover obverse (inverted for ease in reading)



Markings correlation



Members of the League of Nations' decision making Council included Sean T. O'Kelly, Edvard Beneš, August Zaleski, Sir Anthony Eden and Lord Cecil of Chelwood.



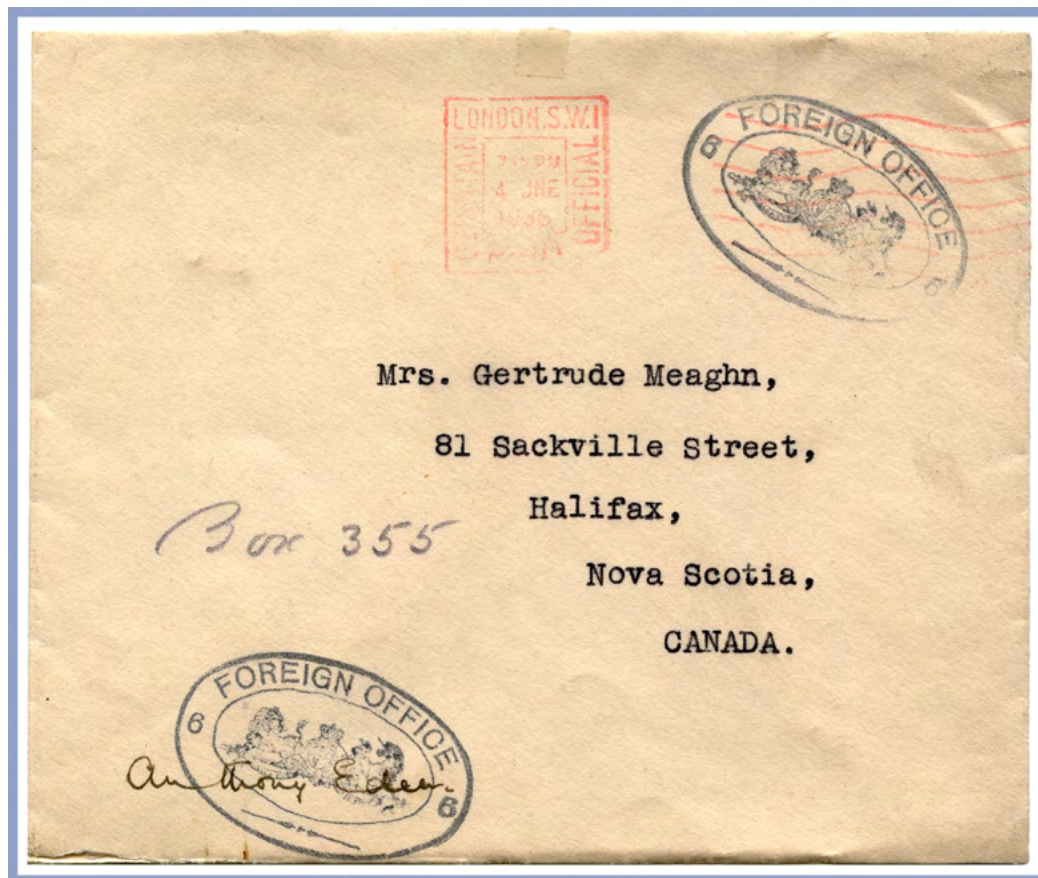
Sean T. O'Kelly



August Zaleski



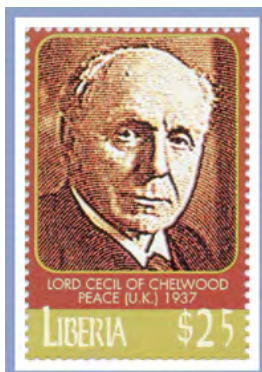
Edvard Beneš



British Foreign Office, London, Great Britain to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 4 June 1936

Foreign surface letter rate paid by 'Official PAID' (in square) machine cancel device

Signed by Sir Anthony Eden, British Secretary for Foreign Affairs and League Council member



Lord Cecil of Chelwood

The League of Nations Council awarded the disputed land area to Colombia on 19 June 1934 based on the previous agreement reached between Colombia and Peru. Being out-classed militarily in the region, Peru decided to accept the Council's decision and the port city of Leticia remained a sovereign part of Colombia.



Leticia, Colombia on the banks of the Amazon River